



County Services Committee Meeting Minutes

Lee County, Illinois

Tuesday, August 13, 2024 at 9:00 AM

Old Lee County Courthouse, Third Floor Boardroom, 112 E 2nd St, Dixon, IL 61021

I. Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 9:02 a.m., by Chair Jack Skrogstad.

II. Committee Member Roll Call: Chair Jack Skrogstad, Vice Chair Dean Freil, Katie White, Ron Gascoigne, Reed Akre, Ali Huss

Jack Skrogstad, Dean Freil, Reed Akre, and Ali Huss attended in person. Katie White and Ron Gascoigne were absent.

Also present: Keane Hudson, Tom Kitson (9:50-10:01), and Mike Koppien (Board Members), Dave Anderson (County Engineer/Highway Department), Charley Boonstra (State's Attorney), Jennifer Boyd (Assessor), Jeremy Englund (Administrator), Paul Gorski (IT Director), Laura Mangrum (Deputy Zoning Administrator), Nancy Petersen (County Clerk and Recorder), Paul Rudolphi (Treasurer), Chris Tennyson (Regional Office of Education Superintendent), and Becky Brenner (Board Secretary) all attended in person.

III. Public Attendees

Greg Gates (Director of the Reagan Mass Transit District - RMTD). Greg walked the committee through the report that he submitted from RMTD. He reported that the transition from LOTS to RMTD has been smooth. The RMTD will be presenting information regarding their fixed route feasibility study at the August 22nd County Board meeting.

IV. Approval of the Minutes from the Previous Meeting - (July 9, 2024)

Minutes from the July 9, 2024, County Services Committee Meeting were approved as presented without modification.

V. Transportation/Solid Waste

A. *Monthly Report*

Dave Anderson walked the committee through the report that he submitted. This report will be attached to a copy of the minutes and included in the August County Board agenda packet. As part of his report, Dave discussed the reasons why the department is planning to replace the bridge on Brooklyn Road just North of US Rt. 30 next year. In addition, he informed the committee of the hot mix asphalt overlay projects that are planned for Perry Road and Inlet/Sublette Roads in the coming two years. The committee is supportive of these decisions. Dave also wanted to correct an error in his report. The Wyoming Twp. HMA had not been completed.

B. *Highway Department*

1. *Ameresco Lee County RNG LLC Pipeline Project - Lee County Road Use Agreement*

Motion to move the Ameresco Lee County RNG LLC Pipeline Project - Lee County Road Use Agreement to the Executive Committee for inclusion on the August County Board agenda? **Moved** by Dean Freil. **Second** by Ali Huss. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

2. *Ordinance Authorizing Execution of the Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Network Agreement (IPWMAN)*

Motion to move the Ordinance Authorizing Execution of the Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Network Agreement to the Executive Committee to hold over on the August County Board agenda? **Moved** by Reed Akre. **Second** by Ali Huss. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

3. *Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Agreement*

Since the Ordinance Authorizing Execution of the Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Network Agreement is required to hold over until the September County Board Meeting, the committee tabled the IPWMAN Agreement and will motion to move it forward during the September County Services meeting.

Motion to table the Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Agreement. **Moved** by Reed Akre. **Second** by Ali Huss. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

C. *Solid Waste Management*

Dave Anderson reported that electronics collection would continue until about November 1st.

VI. Assessor's Office - GIS Department

A. *Assessor's Office*

1. Monthly Report

Jennifer Boyd walked the committee through the detailed report that she submitted. This report will be attached to the minutes and included in the August County Board agenda packet.

B. *GIS Department (Geographic Information System)*

1. Monthly Report

Sami Elarifi was not able to attend the meeting but submitted a detailed report. Jennifer Boyd walked the committee through the report that will be attached to the minutes and included in the August County Board agenda packet.

VII. County Board

Jeremy Englund reported that he continues to work closely with the County Financial Director, Treasurer, and Department Heads to compile the FY2025 budget. Currently there is a roughly \$1.4 million gap between the budget requests and projected revenue. A decrease in State revenue, especially in PPRT, is making the process more

difficult. He also explained that due to some funding changes at the State level, the County lost the \$4.9 million dollar grant for this budget year that was going to help in building the new Highway facility. The County will reapply for the next budget year and continues to go forward with phase 1 engineering and environmental studies.

VIII. County Clerk and Recorder's Office

A. *Monthly Report*

Nancy Peterson walked the committee through the report that she submitted. The report will be attached to the minutes and included in the August County Board agenda packet.

IX. IT Department (Information Technology)

A. *Monthly Report*

Paul Gorski submitted a detailed report from the IT Department. This report will be attached to the minutes and included in the August County Board agenda packet.

X. ROE (Regional Office of Education #47)

A. *Monthly Report*

Chris Tennyson walked the committee through the detailed report that he submitted. The report will be attached to the minutes and included in the August County Board agenda packet.

XI. Veterans Assistance

There was no report from Veterans Assistance.

XII. Zoning / Planning

A. *Monthly Report*

Alice Henkel submitted a detailed report from the Zoning Department. Alice was not able to attend the meeting, so Laura Mangrum walked the committee through the report.

B. *Petitions Going To the Zoning Board of Appeals - 1 Petition*

1. Petition No. 24-P-1630 by Alicia Hall, Brandon Miller, ReAnn Miller, Heather Settles and William Schaneberg, as owners of certain real property known as PIN 07-02-33-252-011, commonly known as 1127 E. River Road, Dixon, Illinois located along E. River Road, approximately 925 feet northeast of Stony Point Road and 667 feet southwest of Shop Road, in Dixon Township, Lee County, Illinois, filed a Petition for Special Use with the Lee County Zoning Office for the purpose of a private campground. The parcel is currently zoned Ag-1, Rural/Agricultural District and is approximately 1.75 acres in size.

Motion to move Petition 24-P-1630 to the Executive Committee for inclusion on the August County Board Agenda? **Moved** by Dean Freil.

Second by Ali Huss. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

C. *Petitions Coming From the Zoning Board of Appeals - 1 Petition*

1. Petition No. 24-P-1629 by Richard A. Humphrey, Jr. and Brenda D. Humphrey, regarding part of PIN 18-08-13-100-006, located in South Dixon Township. The parcel is currently zoned Ag-1, Rural/Agricultural District. Petitioner is requesting a Special Use Permit for the purpose of Inventory or Materials Storage, Outdoor for the purpose of storing of inventory or materials in relation to the operation of a Skilled Trades Special Use Permit for Midwest Disposal.

Motion to move the resolution for Petition 24-P-1629 to the Executive Committee for inclusion on the August County Board Agenda? **Moved** by Dean Freil. **Second** by Ali Huss. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

D. Petitions Going To the Planning Commission

There were no petitions going to the Planning Commission.

E. Petitions Coming From the Planning Commission

There were no petitions coming from the Planning Commission.

XIII. **Unfinished Business**

There were no items under Unfinished Business.

XIV. **New Business**

A. BAR Form - Hearing Officer for Zoning Petitions

Jeremy Englund explained that for the last two years there have been conversations between the County Board and the Zoning Office on how to restructure and streamline the petitioning process. One option would be to transition from the Zoning Board of Appeals to a hearing officer. The key differences would be having a single decision maker instead of several, potential decrease in the deliberation process, and consistency in representation.

Motion to move the Hearing Officer topic on the agenda to the Executive Committee with a recommendation to approve? **Moved** by Ali Huss. **Second** by Dean Freil. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

XV. **Executive Session**

There was no request for an Executive Session.

XVI. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn at 10:01 a.m. **Moved** by Dean Freil. **Second** by Ali Huss. **Motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

The next County Services Committee Meeting is scheduled for
9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, September 10, 2024

Respectfully submitted by:
Becky Brenner - Board Secretary

Lee County Highway Department
Report to the County Services Committee – AUGUST 2024

The following represents a report of notable Highway Department activities and explanations of requested board actions:

Status of Current Projects

- Township and County Seal Coat – *Completed*
- Township and County Crack Filling – *Completed*
- Alto Twp. HMA Wedging. - *Completed*
- Bradford Twp. HMA Wedging - *Completed*
- Lee Center Twp. HMA Wedging - *Completed*
- Sublette Twp. HMA Wedging - *Completed*
- Township Aggregate - *Ongoing*
- County Aggregate - *Ongoing*
- Dust Palliative – *Completed*
- County Shoulder Stone (Furnish and Place, Various Locations) - *Completed*
- May Twp. HMA – *Completed*
- East Grove Twp. HMA – *Completed*
- Wyoming Twp. HMA – *Completed*
- Hamilton Twp. HMA – *Completed*
- Dixon Twp. HMA Patching – *Not started*
- Marion Twp. HMA Patching – *Complete*
- Chicago Road from Village of Paw Paw East to Dekalb County Line HMA – *Not Started*
- Pipeline Road Bridge (Bradford Twp.) – *Working on Substructure*
- Indian Head/Van Petten Road HMA – *To begin after Labor Day*

Other:

- Maintenance crews are mowing, spraying, cutting brush/trees, installing culverts and roadway striping.
- Contract work has begun. We will be managing numerous construction projects totaling approximately \$5.4M, see listing above.
- Phase I engineering has begun on the recent property under option for a new Highway Department facility. The County has engaged Willett Hoffmann and Associates to assist as necessary.

Discussion Items:

- Schedule for County Bridge Replacements and Hot Mix Asphalt (HMA) overlay projects using Federal Funds.

Board Action Items:

- Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Network (IPWMAN)
- Road Use Agreement with Ameresco Pipeline

Solid Waste

Electronics collection is now open on weekdays (excluding County holidays) from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. The collection program will continue until November 1.



MONTHLY ASSESSMENT OFFICE REPORT
August 12, 2024 – County Services Committee

❖ Annual Assessment Work Update:

- 2024 quadrennial townships are S. Dixon, Marion, E. Grove, Harmon and Nelson
- Review of all the parcels in these townships is nearly complete including updating residential and farm building cards.
- All township assessment books have been submitted with the exception of Dixon Township who has turned in one of their assessment books with their pictures and work. They indicated the other book would be ready in the next couple of weeks.
- Task list processing for all townships in the entire county has begun.

❖ Property Tax Appeal Board (PTAB) Updates:

- Board of Review responses for all three 2024 PTAB cases were submitted on or before their deadlines in July.
- The next step is for PTAB to forward each response to the appropriate appellant. Then the appellants will have 30 days to submit a rebuttal. We have confirmation two of the three 2024 PTAB cases have received notice and they each have until 9/7/2024 to submit their rebuttal. BOR response in the last case has not been forwarded yet, but it should be in the next couple of weeks.
 - Z Best 02-15-23-300-007 (new construction mini-storage): Rebuttal deadline 9/7/2024
 - Orvall Gearhart 07-02-30-403-023 (vacant land): Rebuttal deadline 9/7/2024
 - Stephen Dempsey 01-06-14-377-005 (improved residential): BOR Response has not been forwarded to the Appellant yet.
- Hearings for the three PTAB cases listed below were heard here at the Old Court House on July 16, 2024. Administrative Law Judge, Carol Kirbach administered these hearings. Lee County Board of Review was represented by me along with BOR Chair Lori Erbes and Attorney Katie DiPiero of Robbin Schwartz Law Firm. Appellant Richard Humphrey, Jr represented himself and wife, Brenda was present.
 - Cases heard were:
 - 18-08-14-200-010, Improved Farm, 1556 US Rt 52, Tax Year 2018
 - 07-02-35-300-002 Improved Farm, 1843 Mt. Union Rd, Tax Year 2019
 - 18-08-13-100-006 Improved Farm, 1556 Red Brick Rd, Tax Year 2020
 - As a follow up to the 2019 case for the Mt Union Rd property, ALJ Kirbach issued a letter extending 60 days for the parties to stipulate a land value reduction. Aside from that stipulation, per t the ALJ's statements made at the hearing, the case will presumably be dismissed based on appellants failure to provide a court report as required for cases requesting more than \$100,000 in assessed value reduction. (86 Ill. Admin. Code Sec. 1910.98).

- ❖ The Assessment Office welcome new employee, Carmella Zigler. Carmella started August 5, 2024. The staff and I have been training with her on our various programs, the tax cycle, exemptions and general assessment information needed to respond to typical inquiries from taxpayers.



- ❖ As outlined in the GIS Department report, the GIS team and I met with ESRI representative earlier this month and are discussing tools and solutions to increase accuracy and efficiency. Many of these tools are at no additional cost and can be tailored to our needs.
- ❖ I want to recognize Sami Elarifi, GIS Coordinator's accomplishments at the ESRI conference. Not only did Sami participate in the multiple workshops and sessions, but he also led a presentation at the conference for others to learn from. In addition to that, Lee County's assessed valuation map was highlighted during ESRI President, Jack Dangermond's plenary session presentation. This was quite an honor, and I am proud to have Sami Elarifi leading our GIS team.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Boyd, CIAO
Chief County Assessment Officer/GIS Supervisor



Monthly GIS Department Report

August 8, 2024

The GIS Department continued to work on the following:

- Processing property transactions to ensure timely updates to property records.
- Maintaining and updating land use, zoning, and other GIS layers.
- Updating and uploading the NG911 and 911 GIS layers to public safety mapping systems.
- Reviewing and digitizing Lee County broadband providers' coverage maps.
- Assigning new addresses to properties in coordination with the zoning department and 911 center.

Accomplishments:

- A meeting was held between the GIS/Assessment Office and Esri to explore the latest GIS solutions offered by Esri and consider future collaboration possibilities.
- Sami had the opportunity to attend the ESRI User Conference in San Diego, California, the largest GIS conference worldwide. The attendees of this conference have access to a wide range of training opportunities, from hands-on workshops to expert-led sessions, and can explore the forefront of GIS technology and emerging trends.

During the conference, the Lee County assessed valuation map was highlighted by the President of Esri in the plenary session as one of the inspiring works created by Lee County.

Also, Sami delivered a presentation on leveraging GIS solutions and dashboards to streamline the assessor's workflow and enhance the assessment function.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sami Elarifi
GIS Coordinator



COUNTY CLERK & RECORDER
REPORT FOR AUGUST COMMITTEE MEETING

Election Department Updates:

- **GENERAL ELECTION NOVEMBER 5, 2024**
- August 7th begins the process for applying for Vote by Mail Ballots. The first day to mail out Ballots is September 26th and last day is October 31st.
- Early Voting starts Thursday September 26th here in the courthouse on the first floor from 8:15 to 4:15 p.m.
- This week my office will be mailing out post cards to any voter that has not opted in or out for permanent vote by mail. County Website has all the information and the forms needed to opt out or sign up for permanent vote by mail. Voters can also mail back the post card with the appropriate box checked. County presently has approximately 2000 voters that have opted in for permanent vote by mail.
- There is always a need for Election Judges – please see the election office on the first floor!

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Petersen
Lee County Clerk & Recorder



August 12, 2024

IT Board Report – August 2024

1. Incident Report – Microsoft cloud services interruption.

On Thursday, July 18, 2024 Microsoft experienced outages in its Azure cloud services system. We saw this as interruptions in our OnBoard Meeting system (if you remember that was a board meeting night) and a couple of other systems we use. The outage started in the early evening and was largely resolved by midnight. There was not much we could do to mitigate the problem, we just had to wait for the services to come back online. Fortunately, this is a relatively rare situation.

2. Incident Report – CrowdStrike Falcon patch failure.

Also on July 18, 2024, or technically early morning Friday, July 19, CrowdStrike, the developer of the Falcon anti-ransomware software we use, issued a faulty update that locked up most of the PCs it was installed on here in Lee County and worldwide. Over 8 million computers were affected.

I discovered the problem just after 1 AM when some of my monitoring systems started reporting failures. Shortly after 2 AM I called the jail and jail staff confirmed there were some computers down. By 4 AM I learned of the (very manual) fix. I improved upon the fix by semi-automating it and headed into Dixon to start applying the patch.

Shortly before 6 AM, we started fixing computers and servers at the Jail, then New Courts, Elections then Old Courts, Animal Control and Highway. By 10 AM Friday most Lee County computers and servers were up and running, so we had minimal downtime. We wrapped up miscellaneous computers later Friday and on Monday.

CrowdStrike Falcon is one of the best anti-ransomware platforms out there, and we get it free from the State of Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT). DoIT helps monitor our computers 24/7. 365 days a year working with CrowdStrike staff. It is a very nice arrangement, unfortunately, this hiccup occurred.

Lee County IT was able to respond to this problem quickly because we have a real, “feet on the ground” IT team. I thank the Lee County Board for supporting the IT team and giving us the tools we need to keep county departments up and running. I also thank Jonathan Henrikson and Travis Null for their diligent work on restoring the computers to working order.

3. Current IT projects include: (Given 1 and 2 above, I'll keep this short.)

- Our current focus is deploying over thirty new laptop and desktop computers and mobile devices to various county departments.

Contact me with any questions. (July 18 and July 19 events were unrelated, according to Microsoft.)

Paul Gorski, IT Director, Lee County, IL, 815-285-8166, pgorski@countyoflee.org



Report to County Services of Lee County Board

August 13, 2024 | 9:00 AM

1) RIDERSHIP DATA (May 1, 2024 – July 31, 2024)

	May, 2024	June, 2024	FY 24 TOTAL	July, 2024
RIDES	8,443	6,961	93,342	7,917
SERVICE HOURS	2,591	1,954	28,422	2,301
MILES OF SERVICE	71,533	54,979	773,681	61,614
FUEL COST	\$22,266.51	\$20,368.11	\$244,756.75	\$19,273.32

2) DEVELOPMENTS

a) Architectural/Engineering Firm / Oregon facility construction

- i) With the transition to RMTD now complete, work will resume with Larson and Darby, architectural firm out of Rockford, on Oregon facility construction
- ii) Pre-award concurrence has been received from IDOT. Next step is to go out for a General Contractor to oversee the construction project.
- iii) This project is part of RMTD application under REBUILD 1

b) Feasibility Studies: Dixon and Rochelle

- i) RLS and Associates is entering final phase of the Feasibility Studies for Dixon and Rochelle.
- ii) Presentations by RLS have been planned for Dixon City Council, Lee County Board and Rochelle City Council for August. No presentation confirmed with Ogle County Board as of yet.
- iii) The two (2) studies are looking at the potential development of fixed routes in the communities.

c) RMTD Awarded Funding to Complete SPR Funding on Transportation Needs

- i) A two-year contract with the State Planning and Research Division of IDOT has been executed
- ii) Contractual amount is \$243,594 for the two-year period
- iii) This project will look at the general “transportation needs” of residents in Lee and Ogle Counties, specifically those areas of the counties more remote in nature
- iv) RMTD will publish a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a university partner to assist with SPR grant.

d) Budget/Contracts for FY 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)

- (1) IDOT starting to issue FY 2025 Contracts Applications have been submitted to IDOT.
- (2) Contractual amounts for State Fiscal Year 2025 are as follows:
 - (a) 5311 Contract: \$283,450
 - (b) 5311F Contract (I-88): \$1,100,000
 - (c) 5311F Contract (I-39): \$929,606
 - (d) DOAP Contract: \$1,867,008

e) Rural Winnebago County Transit Services

- i) Work continuing on agreement for RMTD to provide transit services in rural (western) Winnebago County.
- ii) Representatives from Winnebago County, IDOT and RTAC visited RMTD on July 17.
- iii) The contractual budget proposed by IDOT for this new rural service is as follows:
 - (i) 5311 Contract: \$207,864
 - (ii) DOAP Contract: \$798,728

f) Bidding Opportunities

- i) A Request for Proposals (RFP), for Information Technology Services (IT) was released in early June, with a total of three (3) response submissions received by the 4:00 PM Central Time deadline on August 16, 2024.
 - (1) Review process of the submissions has been completed. Paperwork submitted to IDOT for pre-award concurrence.
 - (2) The IT firm chosen will have a three-year contract with two (2) additional one-year options.

- ii) A Request for Proposals (RFP) for Auditing Services was released in June as well, with submissions due in by 4:00 PM Central Time on Monday, July 1, 2024.
 - (1) Two (2) submissions were received from Auditing Firms.
 - (2) Internal review process has been initiated.
 - (3) This will be a three (3) year contract with two (2) additional one-year options for the awarded Auditing Firm.
 - iii) RMTD will also be publishing, in the coming weeks, an RFP for a Data Analysis Partner for the Transportation Desert Grant project (see 2nd page of this report, section g), awarded funding to RMTD by the State Planning and Research arm of IDOT.
 - iv) An upcoming bid opportunity to operate Intercity Bus services on I-88 and I-39 will be forthcoming in the next six (6) months, with the selected operator beginning on July 1, 2025.
- g) Hydrogen Fuel Feasibility Study**
- i) RMTD submitted an application on the feasibility of hydrogen fuel cell vehicles in rural public transportation system. Proposal was submitted is to the State Planning and Research of IDOT.
 - ii) RMTD is awaiting word back from IDOT/State Planning and Research on whether its hydrogen proposal will be awarded funding.
- h) Vehicle Procurement**
- (1) Pending transfer of two (2) buses from non-profit in Sterling.
 - (2) RMTD received was awarded 6 vehicles (2 minivans, 4 light duty buses) via IDOT's 2022 CVP Application. Delivery in 2025.
 - (3) RMTD collaboration with IDOT on a federal proposal to the Low/No Emission Grants.
 - (a) RMTD will procure two (2) electric buses via this proposal.

3) OPERATIONAL AND CAPITAL RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

- a) Capital Funding / REBUILD Round 1**
- i) Application includes Construction of new Oregon location
 - ii) Furnishings and equipment for Oregon facility
 - iii) Implementation of video surveillance cameras in 17 of RMTD's buses and minivans (completed)
 - iv) Three (3) new buses (Ford transit type vehicles)
- b) Capital Funding / REBUILD Round 2**
- (1) Notice of State Award being processed by IDOT
 - (2) RMTD Proposal will allow for the following:
 - (a) Two electric vehicles for use in the RMTD system
 - (b) Three (3) new offices at Reagan Transit Center and secured file room/storage room
 - (c) Develop new Conference Room between Reagan Transit Center and Mechanical Bay
 - (d) Geothermal and Solar technologies will be incorporated into complex
- c) Capital Funding / REBUILD Round 3**
- i) IDOT announced that RMTD will receive \$62,500 for the purchase of 2 service vehicles
 - ii) The original proposal included the following:
 - (1) Add 72-feet onto the existing bus barn at Reagan Transit Center,
 - (a) This will provide for an additional twelve (12) spaces for buses
 - (2) Add another bay onto the existing mechanical building
 - (3) Purchase service vehicles including one for maintenance



Regional Office of Education Report

August 2024

SCHOOL SAFETY AND VIOLENT EVENT INCIDENT MANAGEMENT REUNIFICATION TRAINING

Roe 47 hosted a group reunification training at Sauk Valley Community College in July. The training is designed to improve incident management and response integration of school personnel and emergency responders (law enforcement, re, EMS) to violent events in schools. The course provides a validated model framework for use by school personnel, law enforcement, fire departments, and EMS to manage violent event response to improve time to threat neutralization, medical intervention survivability of victims, and reunification of students with parents/guardians. Currently we have 12 of our school districts that use Sauk Valley Community College as their reunification site to reunite students with their parents if they ever had a violent incident in their school district. Several of those districts were able to send police, fire, EMS and school personnel to this training session. We spent the day preparing for an actual reunification event and then we ran through two full participation reunification exercises. The training was very successful in that it provided us an opportunity to learn and make improvements. We will look to have additional reunification trainings in the future.

Professional Learning & Educational Services

Current Programs - Office of Professional Learning & Educational Services
Induction & Mentoring
Community Partnership Grant/IDPH Trauma Grant
Education Pathway Endorsement
Manufacturing, Health Science & Agriculture Endorsement Programs
Elevating Special Educators
School Improvement & Strategic Planning
School Improvement Cooperative (instructional coaching, training, networking)

Social Emotional Learning/Trauma/Youth Mental Health First Aid/TRS I-A
Early Childhood Professional Learning
Family Education & Engagement
NEXUS Family Support Services
Student Attendance
Computer Science Capacity Building
Afterschool Program

Office of Professional Learning & Ed Services: Professional Learning & School Improvement

- The Office of Professional Learning & Ed Services has been awarded an afterschool program grant, a computer science grant, Education Pathways Round 5 grant, and the Truancy and Alternative Learning Opportunities grant from ISBE. The Office is waiting to hear on competitive proposals that were submitted for R3 grant, Early Childhood PFAE grant,
- 22 schools have completed the TRS-IA.
- Professional Learning is excited to share that we are launching a third Science of Reading cohort and a new Science of Math cohort for the fall of 2024. Science of Math training is provided through a subgrant from Math for ALL with funding from the US Department of Education.

Office of Professional Learning & Ed Services: Parent Engagement & Community Outreach

- To date, ROE 47 has 139 partners on its IRIS referral platform. There have been 2592 referrals and 1468 families served.
- Over 7,000 outreach bags with a parent-child engagement activity and information on trauma have been disseminated to local schools, shelters, and food banks.
- ROE 47 has been present at 36 community events, reaching over 10,000 families.
- Seven family education and engagement sessions were conducted.
- The ROE 47 Pathway Program partnered with Teen Turf in Amboy to pilot Workplace Wednesday - Student Edition during July 2024. Visits included the First National Bank in

Amboy; TCI Manufacturing and other businesses, giving students a first - hand look at career opportunities within their own communities.

- Workplace Wednesday is a professional learning series for educators and is designed to equip educators with valuable insights into career pathways for our students. Representatives from diverse industries and training providers shared their expertise, offering invaluable information on internships, apprenticeships, and post-secondary options. Teacher participants also engaged in informative discussions with professionals from Manpower Inc., BEST, ROE #47, Project First Rate, Trade Union #25, Value Lab, the Marine Corps, WACC, 4-C Higher Education, and the YWCA at Workplace Wednesday SUPERSIZED hosted at the ROE. This collaborative event empowered educators to better guide students towards fulfilling career paths.
- Family Educators and ROE 47 PL & Educational Service staff have attended over 36 community events and reached over 10,000 families with parent-child activities, educational materials, and links to EC programs and community services through our IRIS referral platform. In FY24, from July 1, 2023 - July 31, 2024 the office has hosted or participated in community events that facilitated parent-child interaction and heightened awareness of EC opportunities, including:
 - Lee County Baby Shower (8 families)
 - Sterling Hot Dog Days (400 participants)
 - Back to School Bash (125 participants)
 - Paw Paw Back to School Bash (100 participants)
 - Taste of Fiesta (Sterling) (500 participants)
 - Prophetstown BlockFest (11 children)
 - Polo Library - October 3 (12 families)
 - Ogle County Baby Shower (75 families)
 - Polo Library - October 24: (12 families)
 - Trunk or Treat - Sterling (October 25): 500 children
 - Trunk or Treat - Dixon (October 25): 475 children
 - Build A Pet Clubhouse - November 4: 31 children
 - PLT Preschool Parent Education Event - November 6: 27 parents
 - Polo Christmas - December 2: 190 children
 - Sterling Sites & Sounds - December 1: 450 children
 - Blockfest (Sterling Public Schools Early Childhood): 18 families
 - Blockfest (Oregon) - January 20: 12 families, 25 children
 - Empowered Parents Session 1 - January 22: 15 caregivers
 - Virtual Baby Shower - January 24: 8 new & expectant mothers; 9 community organizations
 - Build A Pet Clubhouse - February 10: 33 children
 - Empowered Parents Session 2 - February 12: 12 caregivers
 - Rochelle Hub Family Engagement Night - February 15: 75 children and caregivers
 - Blockfest Amboy - March 1: 22 children
 - Amboy PFA & Kindergarten Family Night: 50 caregivers and children
 - Byron for Parent University - March 12: 11 caregivers

- Empowered Parents Session 3 - March 18: 14 caregivers
 - Blockfest Riverdale Preschool - March 18-21: 60 caregivers
 - AFC Family Connections Night: 15 caregivers and children
 - Building Brains (Sterling): 9 participants
 - Building Brains (Byron): 30 participants
 - Building Brains (Dixon): 14 participants
 - YMCA Outdoor Adventure Fest: 600 participants
 - Sauk Valley Child Fair: 800 participants
 - Summer Splash (Rock Falls): 50 families
 - Prophetstown Back to School Bash 2024
 - Bumps, Babies & Toddlers (Dixon)
- ROE 47's Grandma Bonnie's Back to School Supply Closet served over 16 communities at 2 backpack distribution events in Amboy and Sterling in July 2024.
 - ROE 47 recently donated 500 outreach bags to the Let's Feed Our Children program sponsored by Whiteside County United Way and 300 outreach bags to Summer Eats program sponsored by Lee County United Way. Bags contain a book, a personal care item, math games, summer fun events for families, information about trauma and mental health, and other helpful resources - all at no cost to families. This outreach is sponsored by the ISBE community partnership grant and a grant from the Illinois Department of Public Health.
 - A social emotional lending library has been established that contains Blockfest, Mindful Trails, family engagement activities and Slumberkins resources. These items are available for check out to schools and agencies. We have 10 Mindful Trails, 15 Slumberkins StoryWalks, 15 Slumberkins Big Books, and Slumberkins books with stuffed animals, as well as a number of games and activities. To date, materials have been used for school wide student learning opportunities, staff professional development, community/school events, and school/community family engagement events.
 - A monthly digital family newsletter has been developed and deployed through Mail Chimp on a monthly basis. Newsletters include parenting information, community family events, early childhood programming and service information, and other important links. Parents/caregivers can subscribe to the ROE Family Newsletter at <https://mailchi.mp/2cde621b466f/family-sign-up>

Office of Professional Learning & Ed Services: Social Media

The department's social media presence continues to grow. Like our page on Facebook (Regional Office of Education #47) and download our ROE47 App for weekly teacher talks, instructional tips, news, giveaways, updates & more! Follow us on Twitter @RegionalOffice47 Want to hear from educators & students in the classroom? Check out our Teacher Talks on YouTube! We have an extensive library of 153 videos (and growing) in our collection!

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Teacher Talk with Madi Cumberland, Education Endorsement recipient...
 20:18

Teacher Talk with Madi Cumberland, Education Endorsement recipient...
 13:40

Upcoming Events

FAMILY EVENTS HAPPENING THIS
SUMMER 

JUNE 1 * CHILD FAIR
 SAUK VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE | 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

JUNE 21 * ROCK FALLS SUMMER SPLASH
 ROCK FALLS | 2:00 PM - 8:00 PM

JULY 5 * PETUNIA FESTIVAL FAMILY FUN NIGHT
 DIXON | 5:00 - 7:00 PM

JULY 13 * BUMPS, BABIES, & TODDLERS RESOURCE FAIR
 DIXON PARK DISTRICT FACILITY, DIXON | 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

JULY 26 * PTOWN PROUD BACK TO SCHOOL BASH
 PROPHETSTOWN | 5:00 - 7:00 PM

AUGUST 2 * HOT DOG DAYS
 STERLING | 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

AUGUST 2 * FORRESTON SAUKERKRAUT DAYS
 FORRESTON | 6:00 - 9:00 PM

AUGUST 10 * BACK TO SCHOOL BASH (PREK - THIRD GRADE)
 WOODEN WONDERLAND PARK, DIXON | 9:00-11:00 AM


 SCAN FOR MORE INFORMATION & EVENTS
 OR TEXT 815.764.1194


 REGIONAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION #47
 2214 E 4th Street, Suite B | Sterling, IL | 815.625.1495
www.roe47.org  @regofficeofed47  @LOWR0E47  @ROE4731

BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

**WE ARE LOOKING FOR
 COMMUNITY AGENCIES TO
 JOIN US FOR A MORNING OF
 FUN ON AUGUST 10TH FROM
 9-11**

**LOCATION: DIXON WOODEN
 WONDERLAND/SPLASH PAD
 1298 WASHINGTON AVE #1200,
 DIXON IL**

Please contact Ashley Teel
ateel@roe47.org
 if you are interested in
 signing your agency up for
 our event!



ROE 47 EXPLORING EdTech Summit

Calling ALL educators! Join the LTC and ROE team for a fun, fast-paced exploration of cutting-edge tools, product updates, and emergent edtech trends!

Where: Sauk Valley Community College

When: August 7, 2024

Time: 8:30 am - 2:30 pm

Ed Tech Share!

Learn about the newest tech tools that you can use to start your school year off right!

Perfect for All Educators

The summit will offer something for everyone... elementary, secondary, media specialists, administrators...all are welcome!

Register Here:



LEARNING
TECHNOLOGY
CENTER of ILLINOIS



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COMMUNITY PARENT Café's CONNECTION

Sharing our stories to help take care of ourselves and our families!

FUN IN THE SUN!

School is coming to an end. Flowers are blooming. What are you looking forward to?



MAY 14 @ 7PM

WHAT'S ON THE GRILL?

Similar to what's on your plate. Let's chat talk the joys and challenges of the summer so far.



JUNE 4 @ 7PM

MAKING LEMONADE WITH ONLY LEMONS!

A focus on families with members who have diverse abilities and special needs.



JULY 9 @ 7PM

BACK TO SCHOOL!

Get ready to start the new school year off strong!



AUGUST 13 @ 7PM



Register by scanning the QR code or text 815.764.1194

More Info: gheimerdingerbaake@roe47.org



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NEW STAFF ORIENTATION

Discover the array of services and resources offered by the Regional Office of Education #47 through engaging interactive activities.



NEW ADMINISTRATOR

July 29, 2024 | 9:00 - 11:00 AM

- Introduction to mentoring opportunities for administrators
- Developing effective communication strategies with stakeholder groups
- Understanding teacher evaluation processes
- Networking opportunities for new administrators

\$20 for SIP Co-op | \$40 for Non SIP Co-op Members



NEW TEACHER

August 6, 2024 | 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

- Licensure process
- Mentoring expectations
- Effective communication with parents and colleagues
- Professional teaching standards
- Planning for the initial critical days of school
- Networking opportunities for new teachers

\$20 for SIP Co-op | \$40 for Non SIP Co-op Members



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School Supply Drive

STUFF THE BUS!

Benefitting Sauk Valley Area Schools

11a-6p on Wednesday, August 7th at
Goodwill - Sterling 2216 E. 4th St. Sterling, IL 61081

Donations Needed

Book Bags - Crayons - #2 Pencils
Disinfecting Wipes - Colored Pencils - Dry Erase Markers
Tissues - Wired Headphones - Pencil Boxes
Scissors - Spiral Notebooks - Glue Sticks

COOL 94 SCHOOL **SHAW LOCAL Radio** **Illinois Central School Bus**



Office of Professional Learning & Ed Services: Professional Learning Events

AUGUST		
8/1/2024	Xello Training #2	Online (Zoom)
8/6/2024	New Teacher Orientation	ROE #47 (In-person)
8/7/2024	EdTech Summit	SVCC (In-person)

July 2024 Participants - 104

Tuesday, July 9

Restorative Practices @ SVCC

Wednesday, July 10

Workplace Wednesdays @ Various Businesses

Thursday, July 11

Pathways Networking Session @ ROE #47

Wednesday, July 17

Workplace Wednesdays @ Various Businesses

Wednesday, July 24

Workplace Wednesdays @ Various Businesses

Thursday, July 25

Youth Mental Health First Aid Training @ ROE #47

Tuesday, July 30

Reading Interventions @ SVCC

Wednesday, July 31

Math Interventions @ SVCC

Workplace Wednesday Supersize @ ROE #47

July 2024 in Photos:







Office of Professional Learning & Ed Services: NEXUS



REGIONAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION 47

HOW WE SUPPORT YOUR DISTRICT

Nexus Program

06/25/2024

207

Families Supported

449

Children Supported

91

McKinney Vinto

650

Goals Met

7,401

Family Contacts



REGIONAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION 47

***HOW WE SUPPORT
YOUR DISTRICT***

Attendance Program

06/25/2024

364

Families Supported

414

Children Supported

27

McKinney Vinto

229

Goals Met

4,581

Family Contacts

Parents as Teachers First Years

We are newly enrolling for our FY 25 fiscal year. We graduated almost half of our families at the end of June, so we have a lot of spots to fill!

The following are important data points from our FY 24 year:



Parents as Teachers First Years Enrollment and Service Provision Snapshot FY 24

Total Enrollment:

- Families: 72
 - Total Families that received visits prenatally: 19
- Adults: 83
- Children: 88
- Prenatal Babies: 7

Children/Prenatal Babies Enrollment by School District:

WHITESIDE

- Sterling: 17
- Rock Falls District 13: 13
- Morrison: 7
- Montmorency: 2
- River Bend: 2
- Prophetstown-Lyndon-Tampico: 2
- Erie: 8
- East Coloma-Nelson: 1
- Rock Falls High School (teen parent): 1

LEE

- Dixon: 14
- Amboy: 1

OGLE

- Rochelle: 15
- Oregon: 7
- Forrestville Valley: 1
- Polo: 1
- Meridian: 4

- Children identified as Homeless: 25
- Children who are Child Welfare Involved: 19
- Children dually enrolled in Early Intervention: 8

Race/Ethnicity of Enrollees:

- Hispanic: 52
- Non-Hispanic: 123
- American Indian/Alaska Native: 2
- Asian: 0
- Black or African-American: 7
- White: 154
- More than one race: 3

Languages Other Than English Spoken by Families:

- Spanish: 18
- Portuguese: 1
- Chuj: 1
- Arabic: 1

Family Experiences and Stressors Present:

(Families may be counted in more than one category)

- Young parents (under age 21): 16
- Child with disabilities/chronic health conditions: 10
- Parent with disabilities/chronic health conditions: 21
- Parent with mental health issues: 34
- Parent with no high school diploma or GED: 18
- Low income: 63
- Recent immigrant or refugee family: 4
- Substance use disorder: 3
- Foster care or other temporary caregiver: 2
- Child abuse/neglect: 11
- Parent incarcerated during child's lifetime: 3
- Housing instability/Homeless: 18
- Very low birth weight/preterm birth: 2
- Death in the immediate family: 1
- Intimate partner violence: 15
- Military deployment: 0

Services Provided:

- Total On-Ground Personal Visits: 681
- Total Video Conferencing Personal Visits: 52
- Total Telecommunication Personal Visits: 141
 - Total Prenatal Visits: 117
 - Number of visits with male caregiver present: 88
 - Number of visits with more than one parent present: 87
- Total On-Ground Group Connection Activities: 23
 - Number of families attending at least one group: 17
 - Number of males participating in at least one group: 4

Education Outreach Program

July was a busy month of training, classroom prep and closing out fiscal year 2024! The Education Outreach Program is gaining steam for the new year and has already begun enrolling new students for the 2024-2025 school year.

Classes resume on August 13th. Our Sterling class location will hold classes every Tuesday and Wednesday from 8-4. This year we will have two teachers on Wednesdays with a specific focus on Math. Our Oregon location will hold classes every Thursday from 8-4 as well. We encourage all of our students to attend class once to twice a week for at least 2 hours at a time and make use of supplemental resources provided by the teachers for studying at home. EOP has a number of online resources, GED prep booklets and study materials for our students to use as well as any school supplies needed to see success. In addition to classes and study resources, we also encourage our students to meet one on one with a tutor if needed. In the past, Sauk Valley Community College has Project V.I.T.A.L. to assist with our students struggling to meet reading and math standards.

McKinney Vento Homeless Program

Registration and enrollment is a key time to identify our families that are faced with Transitional Housing Arrangements. Immediate enrollment and support services are vital for enhancing the educational success of our students. We are in the process of offering support to community agencies that work and support our families. District wide trainings are being arranged and provided to help alert all the staff for greater opportunities for identifying our families.

Center For Change

Welcome to the start of a new school year! We are thrilled to embark on this exciting journey together, filled with opportunities for growth, learning, and exploration. As we open our doors for a fresh year, we are committed to providing a supportive and engaging environment where each student can thrive and achieve their fullest potential.

As we anxiously await the return of our students and staff. We are excited to announce a number of new staff this year. We have a new Dean of Students this year. His name is Brett Willey. We also have two new teachers joining our team; they are Katie Goden and former Center For Change graduate Vivian Wyatt. We also welcome to the team a new family support specialist and his name is Tyler Verbout. Although we had to say goodbye to some great staff members we are extremely excited to welcome these four tremendous educators to our team! The first day for teachers will be August 12th and the students first day is a 11:25 dismissal on August 14th.

We look forward to collaborating with you to make this year a memorable and successful one for our entire school community. Here's to a fantastic year ahead!



MONTHLY ZONING AND PLANNING REPORT

August 13, 2024 – County Services Committee

ACTIONS COMING FROM THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

1. Petition No. 24-P-1629 by Richard A. Humphrey, Jr. and Brenda D. Humphrey, regarding part of PIN 18-08-13-100-006, located in South Dixon Township. The parcel is currently zoned Ag-1, Rural/Agricultural District. Petitioner is requesting a Special Use Permit for the purpose of Inventory or Materials Storage, Outdoor for the purpose of storing of inventory or materials in relation to the operation of a Skilled Trades Special Use Permit for Midwest Disposal. The ZBA voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend approval of the petition with the following conditions:
 - a. If the owners sell the business (Midwest Disposal) or the property referred to in Petition No. 24-P-1629, the special use permit will become null and void upon sale.
 - b. Additional screening of the area where the containers are being stored.
 - c. No more than fifteen (15) packer trucks may be stored outdoors.
 - d. The washing of the interiors of the packer trucks shall not occur at 1556 Red Brick Road, Dixon, Illinois.

ACTIONS GOING TO THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

1. Petition No. 24-P-1630 by Alicia Hall, Brandon Miller, ReAnn Miller, Heather Settles and William Schaneberg, as owners of certain real property known as PIN 07-02-33-252-011, commonly known as 1127 E. River Road, Dixon, Illinois located along E. River Road, approximately 925 feet northeast of Stony Point Road and 667 feet southwest of Shop Road, in Dixon Township, Lee County, Illinois, filed a Petition for Special Use with the Lee County Zoning Office for the purpose of a private campground. The parcel is currently zoned Ag-1, Rural/Agricultural District and is approximately 1.75 acres in size.

ACTIONS COMING FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION - None

ACTIONS GOING TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION - None

OTHER ACTIONS FROM THE ZONING OFFICE

On July 29th, the County Board and the Zoning office held a public meeting to discuss the County's floodplain ordinance and the County's participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Erin Conley from IDNR was present to discuss the State's role, as well as FEMA's, and why Lee County's compliance is so important. Approximately 35-45 people were present, including board members. We would like to thank all those who were able to be present.

We understand that zoning is a complex topic and that two hours was not enough time to cover everything related to the floodplain ordinance so we would like to emphasize that the Zoning office will always make



time to educate board members and/or members of the public about County policy. We would also like to emphasize that the goal of the Zoning office is to work with landowners to achieve compliance. So long as a non-compliant property owner makes reasonable efforts to correct the violation(s), no fines will be pursued by the Zoning office.

The Zoning office has been contracting with retired Sheriff's Deputy Jared Yater to bring back the Junk and Junk Vehicle Program in conjunction with the Sheriff's Department. A copy of Mr. Yater's status report for the month of July is attached hereto. To summarize, Mr. Yater is currently working to resolve junk, debris and junk vehicle violations on 31 properties. He is now able to request junk/salvage titles for abandoned vehicles or vehicles with lost title without the involvement of the Sheriff's department, freeing up valuable time for our deputies. Mr. Yater has overseen the resolution of violations at five properties. Mr. Yater and I recently travelled to Nachusa to do a comprehensive check of the town. There are approximately 10 properties in Nachusa that we will be looking to work with the property owners to resolve the violations.

It is my understanding that the Zoning office used to do an onsite inspection once new construction was "staked out" and this was part of the building permit process. Due to limited staffing, this practice fell to the wayside. This practice helps confirm that the information reported on the permit is correct (building size, building location, amenities, etc.) which helps the Assessment office. Not having this initial oversight also leads to property owners getting violation notices a year or years after the violation has occurred when it is identified through the Assessment office. I would like to bring this practice back by expanding on Mr. Yater's duties to include zoning compliance check as part of the building permit process.

A zoning compliance check is nothing more than confirming that what is reported on the building permit is what is constructed. Mr. Yater will conduct his first check once the new construction is staked out. He will return to the property mid-construction to confirm the status of the construction. He will complete his last check once construction has been completed and a photograph will be taken at that time. The report from the final compliance check and photo will be provided to the Assessment office.

Mr. Yater is currently performing these duties as part of the work with the Assessment office; however, it may be a year or years after the permit was issued. In talking with Chief Assessment Officer Jennifer Boyd, she agreed that taking a proactive approach would have benefits to both offices and would be more efficient. County Administrator Jeremy England, Mrs. Boyd and I will be meeting to further discuss this process.

The Zoning office has been working with the owner of 511 Willett Ave., Dixon to correct zoning violations specific to the floodplain. The owner has been diligently working to clear materials from the floodplain that occupies a large portion of the property. We are starting to see visible improvement at the location. We look forward to continuing working with the property owner to complete the corrective action.

On July 18, 2023, Steward Creek Solar Project (Phase 1) requested a determination from the Zoning Administrator as to whether the project would be considered substantially underway. On August 11, 2023, Zoning Administrator Dee Duffy found the project to be substantially underway and validating the special use permit to still be active. As part of that determination, Mrs. Duffy requested bi-annual updates on the project as it continues to grind through the PJM interconnection process. A copy of their report is attached hereto. Steward Creek Solar is projecting to achieve interconnection by late 2025.

Lee County's Certified Floodplain Manager Laura Mangrum is currently working with two communities in Lee County that may be able to capitalize on grant opportunities that could be used to correct or minimize their floodplain and/or stormwater management issues. Mrs. Mangrum is helping to educate these communities as to the options that may be available to them and will act as a resource during their application;



however, she will not be telling them what to do nor will she be overseeing their grant application process as these communities have their own governmental structure.

Zoning Board of Appeals Chair Bruce Forster asked me to share a couple of articles with the County Board and they are attached hereto. One article discusses the use of agrivoltaics in southern Illinois (dual use of land to produce agriculture products and solar). The other article discusses the issues surrounding the PJM restructuring.

During the month of July 2024, the Zoning Office processed forty-seven (47) building permits. Permit fees in the amount of \$5,337.40 were collected.

2024

Status Report-Jared (July 2024)

31 Properties with junk/debris/junk cars

Vehicles removed: 6, but most of the clean up is debris/rubbish

Closed: 5 (4 in Woodland Shores)

Working with 14 property owners and making progress

Boats removed: 2

(The average cost to dispose of a boat is \$100)

No response/compliance from property owner(s): 2

Pending SA request for summons due to most items being debris/junk: 2

Needing a letter sent regarding violation(s): 10

Completing junk title work for prop owner: 1

Learning Zoning rules and processes.

-Meet with property owners for building setbacks and provide contact information when needed (EX: When septic/water is involved)

-Working with Alice on forms for:

 Zoning letter to be sent to last known owners of abandoned vehicles to start the junk title process

 Building permit checklist

 New letter concerning junk, debris, rubbish, junk cars (One letter to notify property owners the county has ordinances for all of these things)



STEWARD CREEK SOLAR PHASE 1 SPECIAL USE PERMIT EXTENSION
H2 2024 BIENNIAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

STEWARD CREEK SOLAR, LLC
ALTO AND WILLOW CREEK TOWNSHIPS
LEE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 6, 2024

Prepared for:
Lee County Zoning Administrator
112 E. Second St.
Dixon, IL

Prepared by:
Hexagon Energy, LLC
321 E. Main St. | Suite 500 | Charlottesville, VA 22902
Tel: 434-227-5090 | hexagon-energy.com

INTRODUCTION

On July 18, 2023, the Steward Creek Solar Project (Petition 20-P-1555) provided a letter to the Lee County Zoning Administrator, Dee Duffy, in which the project explicated the justification for a formal substantially underway determination for the project. Based on the information provided and the authority granted to the Lee County Zoning Administrator by the Lee County Board, on August 11, 2023, the Lee County Zoning Administrator determined the Steward Creek Solar Project (Petition 20-P-1555) to be substantially underway, thereby extending the term and validity of its Special Use Permit. This determination was based upon evidence of the project's continued development, compliance with the provisions of the Special Use Permit, the project not being in default of the Lee County ordinance, and the delays, outside of the project's control, to which the project has been subjected.

In conjunction with this determination, the Lee County Zoning Administrator requested the project provide bi-annual updates regarding PJM as it pertains to Steward Creek Solar. The following is the second such update provided by Steward Creek Solar to the Lee County Zoning Administrator.

STEWARD CREEK SOLAR: PJM UPDATES

Since our last update provided in February, there have been a few key Steward Creek Phase 1 developments that pertain to PJM which have been provided below:

MAY, 2024

1. PJM completed the first cluster study of Transition Cycle #1 and provided Steward Creek Solar with the Phase I System Impact Study (SIS) for its TC1 queue positions.
2. These SIS reports documented the identified network upgrades and cost allocations for the project.

JUNE, 2024

1. As required by the PJM Transition Cycle, following the completion of each study phase, the interconnection customer has 30 days to make a decision to continue into the second phase of the interconnection study process. This decision requires the project to demonstrate that site control has been maintained and a second readiness deposit of 10% of identified network upgrades to be made.
2. Steward Creek Solar has elected to continue into the second study phase and has made all of the associated payments. Additionally, PJM has confirmed that the project has been accepted into the second phase.
3. Updated Cycle Timeline
 - a. PJM has updated the TC1 schedule to reflect the actual completion date of TC1 Phase 1, May 21, 2024.



4. Based on the most recent PJM TC1 schedule, a timeline for Steward Creek Solar Phase 1 has been provided below:
 - a. Phase 1 Study (Completed)
 - i. January 22, 2024 through May 21, 2024
 - b. Phase 1 Study Results: Decision Point 1 (Completed)
 - i. May 15, 2024 through June 15, 2024
 - c. Phase 2 Study (In Progress)
 - i. June 21, 2024 through December 17, 2024
 - d. Phase 2 Study Results: Decision Point 2
 - i. December 17, 2024 through January 17, 2025
 - e. Phase 3 Study
 - i. January 17, 2025 through July 17, 2025
 - f. Phase 3 Study Results: Decision Point 3
 - i. July 17, 2025 through August 17, 2025
 - g. Final Interconnection Agreement Negotiation Phase
 - i. July 17, 2025 through September 17, 2025

SUMMARY

PJM confirmed that Steward Creek Solar has progressed into the second phase of the first transition cycle, which began on June 21, 2024 and is scheduled to be completed by December 17, 2024. This means that Steward Creek Solar Phase 1 is still on track to have a completed interconnection study by the fall of 2025. Thus far, PJM has largely kept to their anticipated interconnection schedule for TC1 projects. PJM's adherence to their proposed transition cycle scheduled represents an important step towards receiving permission to place the Steward Creek Solar into service. Furthermore, the completion of the Phase 1 SIS has resulted in Steward Creek Solar Phase 1 having increased clarity regarding expected interconnection costs and timing, thereby allowing us to plan on commencing construction in Q1 of 2026.



Advocates hit try at end run by power grid operator

Company seeks exemptions from some fed reforms

By Nara Schoenberg Chicago Tribune

Last year federal regulators approved a long-awaited set of reforms designed to ease waitlists for new power sources seeking to come online and deliver electricity to homes and businesses.

Such waitlists have emerged as one of the leading barriers to clean energy — including wind and solar power — and the federal reforms were widely viewed as an important step forward.

But now PJM Interconnection, the powerful but little-known company that runs the waitlist in northern Illinois, is pushing back, with requests for exemptions from aspects of the reforms, including a new timeline for key studies.

“PJM is dragging its feet on the clean energy transition and doing everything it can, instead, to create exceptions for itself,” said Clara Summers, the Consumers for a Better Grid campaign manager at the Citizens Utility Board.

CUB is one of seven public interest groups — including the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Union of Concerned Scientists — that have filed a protest with federal regulators saying that PJM is resisting reform and should not be granted many of the exceptions it seeks.

PJM, a federally regulated private company that manages part of the high-voltage electric grid, said in a written statement that it started implementing its own reforms in July 2023, and the exceptions it seeks are “consistent with the ... goals set forth” in the federal reforms.

PJM noted that those goals included streamlining the process by which new power projects connect to the grid and providing useful information to project developers.

PJM’s requests for exemptions come at a time when experts say the United States isn’t moving fast enough to cut planet-warming carbon emissions and stave off the worst effects of climate change.

Adding new wind, solar and battery power is central to state and national plans to reduce emissions and meet ambitious climate goals.

Among the concerns that critics lay out in their protest filing: PJM is seeking an exception to a 150-day time limit for a key study, which examines how a series of proposed projects will affect the electric grid.

PJM is asking to keep its 480-day timeline for the study and an additional facilities study, which compares with only 240 to 330 days allowed for both studies under the federal reforms, according to the protest filing by public interest groups.

“PJM is asking for really long timelines here, and that runs counter to the desired goal: to have a new generation coming online and connecting in a timely and cost-effective manner,” said Summers.

In its filing seeking the exemptions, PJM notes that its time frame for studies is longer but says that's "appropriate for a large (grid operator) with a commensurate size and volume of Interconnection Requests such as PJM, given the complexity and number of Interconnection Requests PJM receives and expects to continue receiving, as well as the number of Transmission Owners with which PJM must coordinate."

PJM is the nation's largest grid operator, coordinating and directing the flow of electricity to more than 65 million people in 13 states and Washington, D.C.

Waits to connect to the grid in the PJM region are typically the longest in the United States, according to a 2024 report by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. And PJM received the lowest score among seven regions in a 2024 report prepared for the business association Advanced Energy United.

That report, the Generator Interconnection Scorecard, gave PJM a D-minus for its grid-connection process.

PJM has said that the scorecard report was based on outdated data and does not take into account reforms implemented by the company starting in 2023.

In the PJM region, the median time a new energy project had to wait before being allowed to connect to the grid was more than five years in 2022, up from just 20 months in 2005.

Among the other proposed exemptions that critics object to: PJM wants permission to impose lower penalties on utilities that fail to complete studies of new energy projects in a timely manner.

Critics are also concerned about PJM's approach to energy storage, or technologies that capture energy for use at a later time.

PJM assumes that energy storage will draw electricity from the grid at times of peak demand, which critics consider "inaccurate" and "nonsensical," according to the protest filing. Peak demand is when energy is most expensive, and energy storage operators would most likely follow economic incentives and charge when energy is least expensive, critics say.

Critics want PJM to follow the procedure set forth in the federal reform package and consider, in some cases, whether the energy storage system will draw electricity during peak demand.

That's important, critics say, because adding energy storage can increase the reliability of the grid at a time when old power plants are retiring.

"It's problematic for this one resource that could really be adding benefit to the grid (to be) treated like it's going to be more of a drain than an addition," Summers said.

Another key issue for critics is grid-enhancing technologies, or GETs, which increase the amount of electricity that existing power lines can safely transmit, using sensors, power flow control devices and analytical tools.

GETs are getting a lot of attention because the existing power grid is too small for today's needs, and new high-voltage power lines are expensive. GETs are cheaper and easier to add.

The federal reforms include a requirement that GETs be considered systematically and consistently when new power projects apply to connect to the grid. Specifically, studies in which utilities determine the grid upgrades necessary to connect new power have to include an evaluation of the cost, feasibility and time savings associated with using certain GETs.

PJM doesn't want to require that in all cases.

"The fact is that a broad spectrum of potential solutions, including GETs, are already considered as part of PJM's (grid-connection) study process," according to PJM's filing.

In its written statement to the Tribune, PJM noted that it has its own grid-connection reform package, approved in 2022. As part of that package, PJM moved to a cluster study approach, in which projects proposing to connect to the grid are studied in groups, rather than one by one.

Cluster studies are widely used and considered to be an improvement over studying projects one by one.

PJM also said in its statement that it plans to process over 250 gigawatts of grid-connection requests by the end of 2026, enough to power millions of homes.

And PJM pointed out that 40 gigawatts of power that it has already approved for grid connection remains unbuilt, due, the company said, to factors unrelated to PJM's approval process. In the past, PJM has argued that such failures to build are the real problem.

"This is the challenge we need to confront as an industry rather than looking back on problems that have been largely addressed," PJM told the Tribune in April.

Critics counter that long waits under PJM's grid-connection process can cause serious problems for a project, even after it gets approval to build.

Chicago
Trib
7-31-24

Sharing the land — not competing for it

Some farmers and solar developers want to work side by side



Alson Time, a postdoctoral research associate, checks soil moisture and a temperature sensor in a soybean plot on July 23. The plot is between solar panels in the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's agrivoltaics farm, where researchers are exploring how crops can coexist with solar panels.

Stacey Wescott/Chicago Tribune

BY KARINA ATKINS CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Matt Riggs' family has been farming in Urbana since 1874. But, his parents had to work second jobs to cushion themselves from the volatile corn and soybean

markets that dominate Illinois' agricultural sector.

It quickly became clear that Riggs would also need to find another income stream if he wanted to keep the farm. He expects to lose \$200 to \$300 on each acre of corn this year, but a craft brewery he and his brother started is keeping the family farm afloat.

In the past few years, Riggs has realized the land his family has worked for 150 years is also ideal for solar panels. It's flat, well-drained and gets lots of sunlight.

As Illinois strives to convert 40% of its energy consumption to renewables by 2030 and 100% by 2050, solar installations are expected to increase by 1,700% over the next five years, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association.

Across the country, approximately 83% of new solar projects developed by 2040 will be installed on farm and ranch land, according to a 2022 American Farmland Trust analysis.

But, broad, low-lying solar arrays are not inherently compatible with farming. They typically take land out of agricultural production. This doesn't have to be the case, however. An emerging field called agrivoltaics suggests shorter, shade-tolerant crops may grow well in the small spaces between panels.

After installing solar panels at his brewery and seeing how reliable they were, Riggs wondered if he could use them to hedge his farm's balance sheet.

"The sun is going to come up on average a certain amount of time so you can build a really stable, predictable financial model, which I looked at having grown up on a farm and was like 'Wow, that's awesome,'" said Riggs.

Some Google searches led him to agrivoltaics.

While there are very few agrivoltaic projects in Illinois, early research and small projects show synergies between solar energy and agriculture. The co-location of solar panels and agriculture could keep farmers in business, improve ecosystem health, feed the country and provide clean energy.

Learning to speak the same language

Agrovoltics is a meeting of the minds between two groups that don't always look at the land the same way. This was on display at a recent farmer forum.

"He became bilingual and now speaks nature as well as technology," said Will Harris, a cattleman from southwest Georgia, of a developer he partnered with to graze sheep beneath solar panels.

Riggs also received a roar of laughter and scoffs during the forum when he said a developer he had considered partnering with last year wouldn't give him first right of refusal on vegetation mowing and trimming plans.

Riggs said he immediately stopped talking to the company, in disbelief that anyone would suggest they knew what was best for his family's land.

"You could offer me a trillion dollars an acre per year. There's no scenario where me or my family would feel comfortable signing the contract," he said.

One of the few Illinois farmers who still owns his farmland, he's passionate about maintaining control and is holding out for the right developer. But, many farmers don't have this luxury.

Approximately 70% of farmland in Illinois is rented from landowners who often live in cities or out of state. When solar developers approach with decadeslong contracts that pay double or triple the going rate per acre, it's hard for landowners to turn down the offers. A farmer whose yearly income is subject to fluctuating market demand can't compete.

But, if farmers and solar companies can find a way to understand each other, a growing number of farmers like Riggs see solar energy as a potential safety net. They could make a passive income from the solar company leases while still raising products for the market.

Opportunities and challenges

The logo for the Solar Farm Summit hosted in Chicago — a sheep overlaid on solar panels — is emblematic of the work that must still be done for agrivoltaics to take off in Illinois.

Sheep and solar panels pair well together. The sheep appreciate the shade from the panels and do a good job keeping the grasses low. But, there aren't many sheep farmers in Illinois, and there isn't a large appetite for lamb products in the United States.

Still, registration more than doubled at this July's summit compared with the inaugural one last year, organizers said.

On a 54-acre property called Solar Farm 2.0 in Champaign, University of Illinois researchers are exploring how row crops, which monopolize Illinois' agricultural output, can coexist alongside solar panels.

Their preliminary research suggests corn, which needs lots of sun and grows high, won't do well among solar arrays. But, shorter, more shade-tolerant crops such as soybeans, wheat, barley and hay may grow well in the small

spaces between panels. In other parts of the country such as Arizona and Massachusetts, agrivoltaic farms are seeing promising yields of specialty groups such as tomatoes, basil and berries.

In Saline County, 165 miles south of Solar Farm 2.0, the American Farmland Trust has partnered with solar developer Sol Systems to see if kernza, a hybrid wheat that improves soil health, might also grow well alongside solar panels in Illinois. However, as with sheep, there isn't a large demand for kernza among American consumers.

Environmentalists have long questioned whether Illinois should be growing so much corn and soybeans in the first place. They're water-intensive, primarily used for biofuels and livestock feed rather than human consumption, and monocropping has degraded soil health, according to a study published by the National Academy of Sciences.

"You have food deserts all over the Midwest where farmers markets are about the only thing going in terms of getting produce there. Is there a way for us to rebuild some specialty crop supply at scale?" posed Ethan Winter, director of the American Farmland Trust's Smart Solar division. The 12-person team only came about three years ago to explore the intersection of solar and agriculture. This is new territory.

The passive income stream from solar arrays could give Illinois farmers the cushioning they need to diversify their harvests.

"For us to nurture this thing and grow it, it won't deliver massive profit year one. We may fall on our faces as we're establishing these crops that are foreign to central Illinois," said Riggs, who is interested in experimenting with more direct-to-consumer products such as berries and flowers. "The cool thing is agrivoltaics can mitigate that risk until we're good at it."

Agrivoltaics is also being pitched as a way to make farming more resilient to climate change. The solar panels could shield crops from the sun and storms as weather becomes more severe.

"As the climate changes, where we may have extreme heat and extreme precipitation, it may actually benefit plants to have some shade. So, it's also very forward-looking research," said Madhu Khanna, director of the University of Illinois research project.

Slowly warming up to solar

Many Illinois farmers are on the defensive as they watch utility-scale, non-agrivoltaic solar projects pop up next to their fields.

Last year, Illinois passed a zoning law that made any land approved for agricultural or industrial use also eligible for solar installations.

Farmers have already had to adapt to an influx of windmills and raised concerns about carbon sequestration in recent years.

“It just seems like people are wanting to start a war right here in central Illinois over all of this green energy stuff,” said Shane Gray, a first-generation farmer in Waverly, Illinois, whose farm is next to Double Black Diamond. At 4,100 acres, it’s the largest solar project east of the Mississippi and is expected to offset 70% of the electricity from the city of Chicago’s municipal operations.

The land was chosen because it’s near a transmission line, said Matt Birchby, president and co-founder of the project developer, Swift Current Energy. While he said the company is open to incorporating agrivoltaics into future plans, nothing will be farmed on this site, which is about the size of 11 family farms.

“If you’re a landowner within a certain radius of a transmission line, you’re either getting a letter in the mail or a knock on the door,” said Alan Bailey, the Midwest solar specialist at American Farmland Trust.

The Illinois Farm Bureau, which represents 3 of every 4 farmers in the state, is against putting solar projects on productive farmland. It advocates for placing them on abandoned brownfield sites, vacant lots and rooftops instead.

But, projects on brownfields and former landfills tend to be smaller and more expensive because of land remediation costs, according to Anna Toenjes, associate vice president of impact at Sol Systems, a solar company experimenting with agrivoltaics in Illinois.

“Having the flexibility to develop projects on different types of land is really critical to achieving the scale needed to achieve the goals set on the federal and state levels,” Toenjes said.

Although solar panels are only projected to cover 1% of total farmland in the United States, the most productive farmland is most likely to be affected, according to the American Farmland Trust analysis. Historically, towns and cities were built next to the richest farmland. Transmission lines, which solar arrays must connect to, were subsequently built next to these highly populated areas, said the organization’s President and CEO John Piotti.

However, agrivoltaics is slowly catching on in rural Illinois. Earlier this month, Riggs’ county Farm Bureau sent his proposal to modify the organization’s hardline stance against solar development to the state-level resolution

committee. If approved, the Illinois Farm Bureau would support public funding for agrivoltaic projects.

Policy will set the pace

Ultimately, state and federal policy will set the pace of progress for agrivoltaics.

Lightstar Renewables, a Boston-based solar developer, applied last month to construct Illinois' largest commercial agrivoltaic project in Kane County.

The fate of the 4.95 megawatt, 36-acre project, which is anticipated to provide enough energy to power 1,100 homes annually and grow hay and soybeans, is in the hands of the state government.

The company found an interested landowner near a transmission line, worked with a local farmer to design an array he can grow beneath and between and successfully pushed the project through the county permitting process.

Now, Lightstar is waiting to be accepted into Illinois Shines, a state-run solar incentive program that can cover up to 40% of the cost of a solar system.

The program receives more applications than grid capacity, even after being allocated more megawatts under the Pritzker administration's 2021 Climate and Equitable Jobs Act.

"We anticipate it will be slow to actually get built and put into operation because of the timeline and capacity limits with Illinois Shines," said Cecelia Stephens, a development manager at Lightstar.

While hopeful the Kane County project will be approved this year, the company plans to apply again in 2025 if it isn't.

Illinois Shines is generally regarded as a national model of how states can support solar development, but Stephens said there is an opportunity for more weight to be given to agrivoltaic projects.

Applications are evaluated with a points-based system. Currently, agrivoltaics only receives one point. For comparison, projects built on rooftops receive three points and projects built on brownfields receive two.

"If the Illinois Shines program could further incentivize or prioritize agrivoltaic projects, I think that would really be something that would help push us forward more quickly," said Stephens.

She pointed to New York as an example of a state that has really invested in the new field. It just announced a grant program that will award up to \$750,000 to

agrivoltaic projects.

Riggs would like to see Illinois Shines' points-based system broken down even further to prioritize projects that will produce the highest agricultural output and create the most farming jobs.

Given that solar farm leases typically last two to four decades, he feels an urgency to get agrivoltaic projects underway.

"Every day we don't have a tiered incentive structure to incentivize real, robust dual-use, there's another project going in that's going to be there for 25 years, and it's a missed opportunity," he said.

The U.S. Department of Energy and Department of Agriculture have put tens of millions of dollars into agrivoltaic research. Solar Farm 2.0 is funded under a \$10 million USDA grant.

There is also bipartisan support in Congress for further research into agrivoltaics. The Farm Bill introduced by House Republicans this May directs the agriculture department to study the impacts of and best practices for "shared solar energy and agricultural production." Additionally, it tells the agriculture department not to fund any solar projects on prime farmland unless they incorporate agrivoltaics or have local government approval.

"The rise of agrivoltatics is a great reason why we need a new Farm Bill every five years," said Samantha Levy, conservation and climate policy manager at American Farmland Trust.

Agrivoltaics was only beginning to be discussed in 2018, so it was not included in the last Farm Bill, which reached its five-year expiration date last year. After failing to come to a consensus, a divided Congress opted to extend the 2018 Farm Bill until this September.

History suggests Congress will likely be in gridlock until after the presidential election in November and consequently extend the 2018 bill another year.

With these federal delays and the backlogs at the state level, Riggs worries that family farmers will lose out on an opportunity to be a part of the clean energy transition and maintain their cherished livelihoods.

"If a project has real agricultural dual-use and was partnered with a small family farm, it's the golden ticket for that family," said Riggs. "Every one of these little community solar projects could literally sustain a family farm for the next generation."